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ABSTRACT

This document consists of comments provided by 20 adult students taught on the World Wide Web by an associate professor from the University of Central Florida's College of Education. The following are among the benefits of Web-based instruction cited by the students, all of whom are over the age of 25: (1) the ease of communicating on-line makes it possible for students to feel just as close if not closer to on-line classmates than they ever felt to "live" classmates; (2) Web-based courses give students opportunities to search the Web and master computer skills that are essential in the world today; (3) the Web enables students to reach other students and their instructors at times other than "live classroom hours" making it easier for students to share information and offer support to one another; (4) the flexibility inherent in Web-based courses allows adult students to balance their educational pursuits with their job and family responsibilities, enabling many people, who might not otherwise have the time, to pursue additional education; and (5) in addition to providing opportunities for on-line discussions and information sharing among peers, Web courses allow students to develop self-sufficiency and engage in independent thinking and research. (MN)

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ED 441 153

"Guess who's coming to college and taking courses via the World Wide Web?"

Larry Hudson

This article is prompted by reading editorials and articles about how bad using the Web is for courses, let alone entire degrees. I am awestruck by the unjustified, unsupported opinions offered by faculty and administrators who are probably not even trying to use the Web for teaching.

I teach ALL courses on the Web to an audience around the state, outside the state, & even out of the country. They are adult learners, those over 25 years old with full time jobs, families, and life responsibilities. Those for whom going to college and earning a bachelors degree was impossible before the Web. "Life got in the way" for them and now because the technology is available they are coming to college. They are motivated, willing to learn how to use technologies, committed to learning, and enjoyable to teach. Now why would I want to say no to such a group of students?

This is not a unique group--adults are everywhere--and willing and interested in going to college. What generally happens is the system gets 'em down with problems of access, scheduling, advising, and other support. Adults won't tolerate this woeful treatment and traditional students shouldn't have to either.

With the right combination of support and training a motivated faculty member can not only use the Web but be successful in teaching on the Web. I can't possibly be the only university faculty member who is having success at teaching on the Web. Yet, what is printed is not by those of us who are good at this; instead we are bombarded by naysayers--we are too busy actually teaching and serving students needs to write editorials.

I would like to offer quotes from some of my Web students. Their analysis and feedback are the impetus for me to continue teaching using the Web.

"I feel closer to my on-line classmates than I have ever felt to my "live" classmates. My instructor is there for us at any time of the day to answer questions or help with assignments." (JK)

"Had I not taken these Web courses I would have missed the opportunity to become more adept at searching the Web and mastering my computer skills which are a must in today's teaching environment. I would have missed the camaraderie of classmates who are there anytime day or night, not just during "live classroom hours", my instructor included.. I feel I have learned more this way than through the traditional classroom environment" (CH)

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"I am a single-parent of one three-year-old child who is the center of my life. I work full-time as an instructor at a vocational-technical center. I have no family living in this state. I am a highly organized, high-initiative type person who has much self-discipline to successfully complete a web-based course while still being able to 'keep one eye' my child, stop to hug him for a bit, then return to my course work." (HW)

"This summer I took my first Web course. It has been my most challenging course this semester, even though I also take two other 'live' classes. All around it has been a positive experience. I plan to take two more Web classes this fall." (JJ)

"I was totally Web illiterate prior to taking my first online course. Fortunately, the course is constructed with all sorts of support systems, including a very understanding instructor, readily available (peer) assistants, and a vast amount of helpful information from fellow students." (KH)

"It is in my opinion, that without the Web based Classes, I would never feel that a degree was attainable. I have learned more through this interactive program than I ever learned in a traditional program. I get to see the "real" person in each of my classmates. It is NOT lonely! Far from it. We are on continuously. I know these people better than I ever knew my other classmates in traditional settings. I know their true opinions, rather than the 'made up so I sound intelligent' opinions people tend to do in regular classes. We are not afraid to express our feelings, and I think I support my classmates when I say, we are challenged to provide backup to our arguments." (RM)

"There is no doubt in my mind that Web Courses have made the difference in the quality of my time management. I have learned a vast amount of knowledge through the three (graduate) courses I have taken that no traditional classroom could ever offer!" (JV)

"I have had the opportunity to take graduate level college classes in both a web-based and a traditional classroom environment. As I compare the learning that occurred in each setting, my highest marks go to the distance learning method.... First, in a classroom environment I found that the instructor spent the majority of the time regurgitating the textbook information that I was able to digest for myself. At a master's level, I was looking for practical application of textbook theory and was disappointed with the results I received. Second, there was little interaction between students primarily because of the lack of any formal means by which we could compare notes and draw from each other's professional experiences.

In the web-based learning environment, I have found that practical experience forms the basis for the majority of the knowledge that is shared. Through on-line discussions, I am able to pose questions to fellow students and receive information that has direct relevancy to my educational objectives. Independent thinking and self-sufficiency in locating research sources is encouraged to the point that it is a primary source of grading criteria." (TD)

"Students help each other out more & offer practical experience information. to each other because it is so readily available & encouraged. Everyone seems so caring & sincerely willing to help out." (SR)

"Web courses fill a niche and I hope they are here to stay." (MR)

"The ability to participate in upper division courses while working full time and not have the burden of driving each evening to the main campus proved to be time and cost effective. The Web provided me with the ability to 'sign on' and obtain information at my leisure. Any adult learner can relate to the challenge of trying to balance work, family and college classes. The web simply makes the balancing a little easier due to its unlimited access." (JB)

"My initial response was that I disliked the Web course and I thought there could no true learning this way. I had been a graduate teaching assistant at my university and taught graduate level education theory classes. That was my paradigm when I began this web course and I was stuck in the "traditional" classroom.

However, now that this experience is closing I have learned more than I expected. Not only have I learned the content of the class, but I have also learned about technologies and resources that I would never had gained in a traditional classes. Being put in a position to use the technology and resources has taught me how to really use it and now I feel confident that I can teach my students more effectively.

Though I tend to avoid discussions, because of my personal disposition, I thoroughly enjoy reading the forums. I learn more from my peers and colleagues than I ever did as an undergraduate or graduate student. The ease of having the conversation over the Web has encouraged me to be more involved than I would have been in a traditional classroom. I can read the entry, take the time to think and reflect, and then make a response. In a traditional classroom as a student I would not have that luxury and would be discouraged to speak up.

The last advantage is that I have felt a great deal of flexibility in this class. I have great access to you as an instructor, which may or may happen in a traditional setting. Also the flexibility to alter my class schedule when uncontrollable events occurred this summer was a tremendous blessing." (MH)

"This … course was the only class left that I needed for my (teacher) certification. It was not offered at all at my primary university. I would not have been able to complete my certification and therefore, not be able to become a teacher." (ST)

"One year ago I was afraid of the mouse, and I was sure that I was going to damage the computer. I began by taking a computer class in a traditional classroom. Well, I did learn how to use the mouse and how to push the power button. I overcame some of my fear. I found the traditional classroom to be very awkward, as there were students who were so far advanced from me that I felt very dumb and not included. The class was large and I did not receive any individual attention. Well enough said about that experience.

Allow me to express the differences I found in taking this class: First I receive individual attention with a click of the mouse. I made friends from across Florida, and being fairly new to this area this is one of the most pleasing experiences afforded to students taking classes on the computer. Time was not an issue when it came to corresponding with fellow students. Like everyone else I am trying to balance family, work and taking classes. If this class had not been available to me, first I would not be Florida certified, and my stepdaughter would not have been able to spend the entire summer with us. I would have had to pay a baby-sitter; drive an hour and one half one way every day. I look at it this way, instead of spending time on the road traveling I am on the computer learning. I do mean learning, as I did not know how to copy and paste, I did not know how to work from one document to another. I certainly did not know how to post or what to do in forum. As you can see this class has not only been rewarding it has been a necessity for me.

"I can sit in my office and make errors and no one knows but me. If I don't know how to do something, I just send out a help message to one of my 50 classmates and someone will help. If I need to talk to the instructor I just send him a message and he responds. What could be simpler or better in this busy world we live in." (GL)

"This course also enables me to be at home with my four teenagers. Taking four courses this summer has been tough with all that a family has to offer and I must say this course has helped me tremendously to be that good mom my kids deserve, or at least give it my best." (JL)

"Web courses are yet another new and improved form of communication and education. The typical college student is no longer the 18-21 year old with no other responsibilities other and pursuing his education. Today, as a result of the burgeoning amount of information and need to know to keep up, students have jobs, are married, have children, are anywhere from 17 to 95 and need to be able to take and manage their learning in an atypical fashion. Web courses provide this variable access. They allow students to learn with their instructor, and their peers, with more interaction than perhaps a classroom setting would allow. They can learn 24 hours a day or only from 1 to 3 in the morning if that is the only time they can afford. The point is they can still learn." (KE)

"Personally, I find Web learning very stimulating and challenging, I'm always afraid if I don't sign-on I'll miss something very important." (MB)

"I started thinking about all the classes I have taken over the past five years and of those classes which ones did I truly learn something from. It is sad to say but in most of the classes I learned very little. Oh I got all A's in the classes but actual learning just didn't take place. Then a truly amazing thing happened. I signed up for this Web course and have learned more about computers, technology, other people, myself, teaching, resources, and how to communicate without turning red in the face than in any class that I have taken so far. It have been one of the most positive experiences with a college course yet." (CP)

"The reality of higher education is the 'it is a business'! We must look at the issue of offering Web classes in terms of a business decision and customer service. Never mind the benefit to society aspect, that's a given. Web classes are in response to the needs of our societal changes, both personal and professional. They are the niche that compliment the true nature of our ever-evolving world of work and hurried, information-packed society. Web classes meet the niche for those of us that "want our cake and want to eat it too"! We can stay informed via the web, meet/socialize via the web, improve our employment prospects and education levels via the web, purchase commodities, and securities via the Web. The question is not why we should justify web classes, rather, the question should be why it has taken so long for universities to implement them." (SR)

"In closing, the world is changing and teachers must change as well. The days of the traditional classroom, come in, be seated, read chapter 10 and complete the exercise at the end is long gone. I really cannot express the vast amount of knowledge I have acquired from taking this class, and I would most certainly take another one. I will also encourage my students to participate in an on-line course. The bottom line is, I feel more prepared to meet my students than ever before. Thanks for the opportunity to experience a new way of learning." (PL)

What is the purpose of teaching if not for students to learn? Why are there university faculty if not to assist in this process? These are moot questions if the next question is answered in the affirmative. Is our goal that students learn? If we are student centered and willing to serve the customers, then using the Web is only a more advanced technological tool than the chalkboard.

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